

S vs Rebirth 171

Chapter 171 Misunderstanding, Misunderstanding Everywhere

While Anna misunderstood Noel's system as the secret that allowed him to absorb all those Demon Crystals in a day instead of the combination of both spirits and their elements, Noel also had another misunderstanding about Anna.

Noel sucked a cold breath while sitting on a chair, contemplating. 'How does Anna have that much Spiritual Energy? But her Spiritual Energy shouldn't be that high since I would have noticed it when she fought against the Advanced Level Demon. In fact, if she had this kind of Spiritual Energy, she would have won against the Advanced Level Demon that tried to protect the Ancient Demon Tree.

'So, she has that kind of progress in the past few months we're together? But I have been training with her this whole time, so where in the world...' Noel fell silent, remembering one mission that allowed her to surpass him.

After a group mission that exterminated the bandits that captured the demons, they had an individual mission.

There was no telling what she had done in that mission and what kind of lucky encounter she had.

'That time? As expected, with the knowledge she has, she should have known about a great opportunity. Just like how she knows about the Sword Saint Tomb, she must know more about it. But how in the world she knows everything?

'Even my Ardagan has to get the knowledge first before giving the mission. How is she getting all the information? Clairvoyant? Nah, if she has that ability, she won't need my brain to come up with a plan.

'Then is there any possible reason why she has gotten all that knowledge?' Noel thought it hard but to no avail. There was no reasonable guess that could answer her. The best he could come up with was Anna having an ancient book of someone from the past.

That book told her about her current knowledge. And her fast progress was due to this Ancient Book.

And the other reason was about her having an artifact that gave her the knowledge. How and what information she got were still in question.

Just like Anna misunderstanding the power of his system, Noel was also misunderstanding Anna's reincarnation. After all, both the system and reincarnation were something that could never come to their mind due to how ridiculous they were.

"Why are you frowning in the morning?" Layla's voice suddenly entered his ears as Noel turned around, finding Layla with a cup of tea.

"Ah, Saintess." Noel nodded, greeting her. He was staying in her house, so of course, he had to help her a bit. At least, by not making her worry. "I'm fine, Saintess. I was thinking a simple matter."

"Is that so?" The Saintess smiled and sat down across Noel. "Are you fine with this outcome, Mr. Noel?"

"You don't have to be that polite to me, Saintess. I'm no different than a commoner now."

"I truly respect you from the bottom of my heart, so I have to." The Saintess shook her head. "After all, you have helped the people without taking any credits. In fact, your reputation is quite bad among the people as they're thinking you are leeching our achievement. I want to tell them everything, but..."

"Please spare me. They won't believe me and will even misunderstand your words. As a result, my reputation will go to rock bottom." Noel shook his head.

"I can respect your decision. Then do you want me to tell you something?" Layla smiled while taking a sip of the tea.

"And that is?"

Layla put down the cup and gently took off her blindfold. When she opened her eyes, she revealed a pair beautiful silver eyes. However, the color in those eyes had faded away.

"I never once regretted sacrificing my eyesight to give others the Moon Blessing. When I lost my ability to see, I gained another ability." She pointed at her ears. "My ears and senses are getting stronger, allowing me to understand what's going on around me."

"That's why I want to tell you... You might lose the recognition of the people as well as their thanks, but you have gained the respect of our Moon Temple, especially me. If you need our help in the future, as long as your goal doesn't clash with the Moon Temple's purpose, we'll help you." She handed him a letter. "This is my letter of introduction. They'll treat you to the best of their ability if you have this letter. Depending on the case, you can receive the help from our Holy Knights."

"This..." Noel widened his eyes. Never in his wildest dreams would he think about getting this powerful letter in this mission.

"Please accept it. I have great expectation of you, Mr. Noel."

Noel scratched the back of his head. "You calling me with honorific is making this awkward. Well, I'll accept it."

The Saintess smiled. "When you gain back your title, I don't mind calling you Lord Noel though. But I guess our status will be kinda similar, so I'll call you by your name when that happens."

"Haha, you really have that much expectation huh." Noel chuckled. "I'll gratefully accept this letter then. Thank you."

She nodded. "One more thing. When you and Miss Anna are going to get married, please tell us, alright? I'll be giving you the blessing of marriage."

"Huh?" Noel dropped his jaw in confusion. "Marry? Me and Anna? How in the world you would come to that conclusion? She killed my entire family, seized the assets... She basically took everything away from me. I'll kill her!"

"Is that so? Then, it must be my misunderstanding. After all, you two look good together. Even when fighting, you are completely in sync. It makes me think you have that kind of relationship as if you're fated to be together before you were even born. But it seems it's only my misunderstanding."

"Yeah, it must be your misunderstanding." Noel nodded in agreement. Even the Moon Goddess didn't stop him from taking revenge, so it should be a misunderstanding.

"If that's the case, then I should step away since I have another job to do. When will you leave? I'm going to see you off."

"Tomorrow before dawn."

"I see. Then, please take it easy today." The Saintess waved her hand as she walked away while putting her blindfold on.

Chapter 172 Reaction

A few days later.

While Anna and Noel were on their way back to the fortress to report about their matter, Earl Hawkins had sent a message to the famous Marquis Stargaze. Anna had helped them a lot, so he should send a letter to the marquis.

Knock!

Knock!

A butler knocked on the door and entered as soon as there was a response from the inside, finding the marquis sitting behind his work desk.

"Master. There is a letter from Earl Hawkins about the young miss. It's currently with pigeon, but he informs us that the actual letter will be arriving later."

"What's the message?" Marquis Stargaze calmly replied. He was a middle-aged man with short blond hair. Unlike Anna's purple eyes, his eyes were blue. His muscular body was hidden neatly underneath his clothes. Despite hearing Anna's name, the marquis didn't react exaggeratively since he had to know about the matter first.

"It seems that she has saved Earl Hawkins from an Advanced Level Demon's encirclement."

"Hoh?" Marquis Stargaze furrowed his eyebrows. "Then, it must be the mission from the Demon Banner Army. How is her bodyguard?"

"She has sent him back and the Demon Banner Army also requests us not to intervene their matters."

"Then, how about her partners?"

"She doesn't have two partners like the usual knight group. This year is a bit different and they're coming in a pair, so..." The butler paused for a moment, hesitating to say it. But since the marquis was waiting for it, he had to tell him. "Her partner is Noel Ardagan."

"Ardagan?"

"Yes. He is Noel Ardagan, the only heir of Count Ardagan."

"She came to me a few months ago and told me that she wanted to torture Noel herself... As a noble, we have to be ruthless, but I don't know about having such a disgusting behavior."

"But Master, it might be because she was dissatisfied with the judgment of the Royal Family who was exiling him."

"Well, whatever. I won't interfere with their business. After that incident, Ardagan Family is gone along with my grudge, so don't interfere with their business. Let Anna solve her own problem, this will be the best situation for her to grow."

"Then, do we need to send another person to look after her?"

The marquis thought for a moment before shaking his head. "No. Anna has been different for quite a while. Instead of observing her, it's better to wait until she's finished showing everything about herself. After that, I'll personally train her."

"Understood. That's right. The earl also told us that Noel Ardagan was most likely leeching off her and the Saintess. He wanted to punish him, but the two protected him, especially the Saintess."

"Which Saintess?"

"Moon Temple."

"Then let him go. The Moon Temple might have bad reputation among the nobles, but the citizens are supporting it. Unless you plan for a civil war, it's better to stay away from the Moon Temple. So, just let them do whatever they want until their graduation. After that, give me report about both of them."

"Understood." The butler politely bowed his head and left the marquis alone again. He was wondering why the marquis didn't do anything. Normally, he would be trying to investigate the other person, which in this case was Noel.

Still, his order was absolute, so there was nothing he could do.

...

Meanwhile, the one who was talking about Noel was not only the Stargaze Family. There was a pair of siblings that had reached the fort where the Demon Banner Army was located.

They had a group of people escorting them. But unlike the previous escort, this group had a slightly better equipment.

"I wonder where Iadre is... Considering he is an Apprentice Knight, is he in the barracks?" The young girl asked while looking around.

"Then, should we go there to ask about him?"

"Yes! Let's not waste any time. We can rest later."

They nodded to each other and headed straight to the barrack. There were many people who were still training under Shale since they weren't taking any mission. Just like Noel and Anna, they took some time off to train themselves to get ready for the next mission.

When the siblings arrived and took a peek of the situation inside the barrack, Shale instantly noticed them and appeared right before them.

"Do you need anything?" Shale asked coldly, while glancing at the people escorting them. They didn't seem to be that strong, but their equipment solved that weakness. Hence, he had to make sure their intention first.

"You are..." The siblings took a step back while the people that escorted them stepped forward, trying to protect them.

"Please go back, young master. This guy is dangerous."

"I am the instructor of this year's recruits, Shale. I think I have the right to know your intention in taking a peek to our training... If you are only a normal citizen without any escort, I won't do this much, but..." He glanced to the escort, considering them as a threat.

"We... We are Rick and Rica. We are here to meet ladre to give him his armor. Do you happen to know about ladre?" Rick stepped forward, stopping them.

"ladre?" Shale looked up, wondering if there was someone with that name. He soon remembered there was one unique individual who required a second identity, Noel. He immediately understood what he had to do. "I do know him. If you're planning to give something to him, you can leave it to me and I'll pass him after he returns from the mission."

"He is in a mission? If we wait for him, will it be that long?"

"I'm not very sure. The mission right now is quite hard and the location is about a few days away from him with horse, so it might take a while." Shale explained.

"Is that so..." Rick thought for a moment before glancing at Rica. "What do you think?"

"We can afford to wait for a week. If he hasn't returned, then we can only do this." She suggested.

"Alright." Rick nodded in agreement and turned to Shale. "That's how it is. I apologize if we're disturbing you. If he has returned, can you tell him that we'll be staying in the nearest inn from this place?"

"No problem."

Rick and Rica then left the barrack as if they were planning their course of action for the next week.

'It seems that no matter which identity he assumes, he's going to be quite popular.' Shale thought while staring at their backs. 'I can now understand why the commander treasures him a lot. He has that charm that makes you want to help him.'

Chapter 173 Benefits

Fortunately, the wait didn't take too long.

Noel and Anna returned five days upon their arrival.

"That's how it is. The Advanced Level Demon has been taken care of and the city is now safe." Noel finished his explanation with a calm nod, assuring him that everything was fine. He also brought back the letter from Earl Hawkins.

Of course, he sang praises for Anna, which was quite a huge shock for Shale.

Normally, the one who would be praised was none other than Noel since Noel's action and conducts made them happy. So, Anna shouldn't be the one to be praised. It wasn't because she wasn't worth the praises, but Noel was simply that good.

'Hmm. Why is the earl praising Anna? Noel should be the one dealing with the whole problem if we're talking about this pair. I guess the name of Noel Ardagan is a bit too big for a city. They're more educated compared to the villagers, so I guess there are many people who don't think highly about Noel. That's probably the reason why the earl is praising Anna. Well, it's not my problem.'

Shale nodded in understanding. "I have confirmed the completion of this mission. The points will be transferred to you tomorrow. And with this, you have completed half of the requirement. Two Individual Missions and Three Group Missions...

"With this pace, I believe you will be able to finish the requirement in the next five months. You might even set up a record. Do you plan to graduate early?"

"Graduation?" Anna raised her eyebrows. "What are we doing after the graduation and what's the benefit?"

,m "Graduation is simply recognizing you as a full-fledged knight of the Demon Banner Army. With this, you can get the benefits of being our knight. As you know, our reputation is quite huge.

"When you show yourself as a full-fledged knight of the Demon Banner Army who is in a mission, the city you pass will have to give you the best accommodation they can offer.

"In return, you have to complete the mission as soon as possible because the city will be able to observe you to know whether you're doing your job properly or abusing your privilege.

"Other benefits comes in the form of horses. You can request to the lord of the city to provide you with a horse in order to travel. Of course, you have to return it later through our partner, the Londwell Mailing Service. The charge will be handled by the Demon Banner Army.

"Of course, a full-fledged knight has more duties than an apprentice knight. For example, the army can station you somewhere. As you know, we're fighting against the demons all around the kingdoms, so we have to send you on a mission personally.

"If you're able to get some achievements, you can be promoted later on. And the benefits will be far above the full-fledged knight. I mean, a full-fledged knight is like an elite knight that nobles can have. Someone above it is beyond what you can think. Of course, you can't simply leave the army that easily. You have to complete some missions if you plan to leave the army so that we won't suffer much.

"The missions itself aren't that hard. The people who usually leave the army are those who don't have courage to pursue the path further, basically cowards. But even with them filling those quotas, the completion rate is around seventy percent."

After listening to Shale's explanation, becoming a full-fledged knight sounded good. And if they could become a captain or even higher, the benefits would be beyond their imagination.

"What's about you, Sir Shale?" Noel couldn't help but ask.

"You don't know who he is?" Anna widened her eyes in shock. This was a common knowledge for nobles, so it was quite surprising that Noel didn't know him. But she also remembered that Noel was ignorant at the start, so it calmed her heart a bit.

"You know who he is?" Noel tilted his head in confusion. "Sorry for being ignorant, alright?"

"Demon Extermination Squad, one of the five elites squad of the Demon Banner Army. It's said that this squad can take down numerous demons by themselves. There was once a man who challenged a thousand demons. He killed all of them by himself. At the orange sky and a river of blood, the man stood on top of the mountain of corpses... He is latter known as the Demon Exterminator Shale, one of the top fighters in the Demon Banner Army." Anna explained with a sigh.

"That was just the past. I'm nothing but your instructor right now, so chill." Shale shrugged. "By the way, Noel, lend me your ears."

Noel thought Shale was going to punish him from lacking of common knowledge, but Shale actually passed the message Rick told him.

After that, he said, "That's all. Since I've received the proof of completion and explained all that stuff, you can leave."

"You're not going to tell us the benefits for becoming someone at your level?" Noel asked.

"Are you planning to become someone like me? I think you have another path in front of you, right?" Shale smirked.

The benefits itself was obvious to Noel. After listening to the explanation, when someone reached Shale's level, even Noble wouldn't dare to treat him badly. Lower class nobles like Baron or Count even had to meet them personally if they visited. They might not be a noble themselves, but if they actually left the army, the nobles would be flocking them to have them marry their sons or daughters.

Still, Noel had a different path than Shale. He didn't plan to become on a simple knight. He wanted to rebuild his Ardagan Family. And for that reason, he would need to leave the army after racking up some achievements.

Noel then sighed and politely nodded to him. "I understand. Thank you for the explanation. I'll be returning to my room."

"En." Shale nodded.

Of course, Noel had to return to his room since he had to pick up a masquerade to meet the siblings.

Chapter 174 Spiritual Enchantment

Noel wasted no time to go to the inn and informed his arrival. Knowing the siblings, they must have given some instruction to the innkeeper, so when he told him about the siblings, the innkeeper immediately informed the siblings.

Finally, he reunited with the siblings once again.

"Ah, ladre." Rick smiled and nodded. After what happened in Roel's house, Rick didn't mind about the honorific anymore. Noel had even told him that he was younger than them.

"Rick, Rica. I'm sorry for making you wait for so long." Noel felt bad for making them wait for days. He thought they would come a bit later, but it turned out to be the other way around.

"We were simply too eager to meet you again. You did nothing wrong." Rick chuckled, assuring him it wasn't his fault.

"We want to thank you for mending the relationship with our father. We have misunderstood each other for so long, so we're grateful to you. Who knows how long it will continue without you helping us." Rica politely lowered her head to thank him.

"Please don't mind about it. I was just being a busy body at that time." Noel waved his hand, telling them to pay no mind.

"That's right. I'm sure that you're waiting for this." Rick tried to change the topic since it would be an endless thanks and apologies if they continued. He placed the wooden armor on the table.

Since it was only a wooden armor, no one would bother to look at this armor, considering wooden armor was useless. They were stiff and weak against a sharp object. Hence, they thought the people who wanted it were foolish.

However, Noel had a different opinion. The wood from the Ancient Demon Tree was durable and flexible. Coupled with a skilled blacksmith and the Spiritual Energy imbued to the armor, it was a superior armor compared to most armor out there.

"So, this is..." Noel looked at the armor excitedly. The armor itself wasn't as big as he imagined. In fact, the contour perfectly matched his body.

The armor would be protecting his body only, not his arms or his legs. But if he trusted that armor and put it underneath his body, it wouldn't look like he was wearing an armor. He could take advantage of it, making the enemy attack his body, which would be blocked by that armor. In that instant, he attacked them back.

"This armor is matching your body line. My father knows that your body hasn't properly grown. I am not very sure, but it seems that you're barely an adult. The age to reach an adulthood is 14 years old, so you are like 15 or 16 years old.

"Hence, my father knows to make the armor as flexible as possible. So, you can use this armor for a long time because it can slightly expand to match your body's line.

"Due to that, we have to properly adjust it for you. Well, you can do that by yourself, but do you mind if we're the one doing it?"

Noel listened to their explanation. Roel seemed to have put a lot of thought into this armor. After some considerations, Noel accepted Rick's offer. "Sure. I don't really mind, considering it's better for the blacksmith's son to put the last adjustment instead of a rookie like me."

"That's great." Rick smiled. "How about coming to my room? The tools are there."

"Sure." Noel nodded in agreement.

Without hesitation, they immediately headed to Rick's room to pick up the tools as Noel carried the armor. It wasn't as heavy as he imagined. Although this additional weight would make him slow down a bit, it wouldn't hinder his fighting ability too much. And if he managed to get used to this armor, it would become a life saving armor.

However, he also noticed a few symbols on the armor.

"Hmm? This is..." Noel narrowed his eyes when he spotted these symbols.

"Ah, those are the things we use to improve the armor. We call it Spirit Enchantment. Basically, those few symbols can direct your Spiritual Energy. There are three symbols embedded into your armor.

"The first is hardening. As the name implies, it'll be a great boost to your defensive power. The second one is impact deflector, which will redirect a portion of the impact off your body. The third one is flexibility so that it can match your body. Unfortunately, my father can't put more because it'll ruin the armor itself.

"Considering the armor's material is extraordinary, it's already abnormal to get three Spiritual Enchantment. Normal weapon can't even get one.

"And only those veteran blacksmiths in our place can even put a Spirit Enchantment in an item. People call it Spirit Weapon or Armor."

"Mhm." Noel nodded after listening to him. But his doubt still remained in his heart. After all, this Spiritual Enchantment was actually something he had seen before. He muttered inwardly, 'This is rune, right? Although the rune is incomplete, it's still the same symbol as the rune I have in my mind.'

'Does that mean the people already know the existence of the runes? Then, the only one who can popularize it is none other than my ancestor. The rune itself comes from Ardagan, so...'

Noel asked, "May I know how do you know about these symbols? If it's a secret, then it's fine."

"No, it's not that much of a secret. Spirit Enchantment has been popularized since one hundred years ago after someone found a notebook containing the symbols. Due to the bad condition of that book, we can only do this much." Rick explained calmly since it wasn't his father that invented the rune anyway.

"And where is that notebook?"

"The original record has been stored in the Greenwood Kingdom's Royal Library. However, some copies have been made and spread because it's an effective weapon that can fight the demons."

"I see..." Noel nodded. He was slightly disappointed since he wouldn't be able to see this book because Greenwood Kingdom was a neighboring kingdom. However, he had some clues that considered the Spiritual Enchantment as one of Rune's applications.

'Now that I think about it, Rune Mastery is teaching me all sorts of runes. I think the first five levels are all about knowledge. Level 6 to level 10 will be all those applications. It seems I have to take my time to level up the Rune Mastery.'

Chapter 175 Adjustment

Noel also thought about the bad possibility that would come from the complete rune.

'If everyone knows about my knowledge about the complete rune that can basically transform the entire Rune System as well as the blacksmith's Enchantment... many kingdom will either form a connection with me or try to kill me for the information.

'Either way, it can also be my last trump card if I can't avenge my parents by myself. Marrying to another kingdom and force them to help me is also an option, but for now, I want to do it by myself. Hence, I need to gain enough reputation first before showing the whole rune if I don't want this kingdom seizing this power. Well, I can even make a unique school about rune in my territory which will allow me to gain some connections with the nobles who will send their people to learn from me. Yeah, there are many ways to use it, so I don't have to rush everything for the time being.'

Noel's expression brightened as they reached Rick's room. Noel also took another look at the incomplete runes.

'Rune itself is just an imaginary power of a single word. The runes embedded into this armor are Harden, Dispersion, and Flexible. In fact, this Dispersion is the exact same thing as my Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune.

'In fact, all my runes like Increase Agility, Strength Blessing, Spiritual Energy Dispersion, and Chain Bind Rune can be described by a single word that is embedded to that rune itself. Agility, Strength, Dispersion, and Chain Runes. Anna's Duplication Rune is the same.

'The embedding process uses the advantage of Demon's parts which are rich in Spiritual Energy, making them a perfect conductor to Spiritual Energy. That's why that's the only way to create a Spiritual Equipment... I think?

'Well, I have spare Honor Points that I can use to upgrade my Rune Mastery, but I'll wait after my expedition to the Sword Saint Tomb since I might need to use it at that time.'

While Noel was thinking, Rick had picked up his tools and came to him. "Noel. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I'm ready. But what are you planning to do?" Noel asked.

"It's simple. You put your armor on so that I can activate the Spiritual Enchantment. After this, you won't have any problem in activating those runes by yourself."

"Ah! Alright..." Noel nodded in agreement, knowing what he had to do. However, this armor was supposed to be worn underneath his clothes, so... "Wait a minute, doesn't that mean..."

"Yes. Please strip." Rick smiled, confirming it without hesitation.

"Well..." Noel made a wry smile. He didn't really mind taking off his shirt to put the armor on and since he was commoner, there was no need to care about others' opinion. But... Noel couldn't help but look at the side.

Yes, there was Rica in the room. Anna had seen his body, so he didn't really mind, but he wondered what the other party thought. It could be considered a harassment after all.

"Rica. Leave the room a bit!" Rick glanced to his sister.

"Wait, what? Can't I stay? I just have to not look, right?" Rica was bewildered.

"Be a proper lady and wait outside!" Rick was adamant in making her leave to the point he dragged her out of the room before locking the door.

When they were busy among themselves, Noel had taken off his shirt and put on this armor.

It was quite tight even for him. It felt like he was wearing a thick layer of tight clothes. But surprisingly, he didn't feel restrained at all. The armor could match his body movement as if it was continuously expanding and shrinking.

"The only adjustment that has to be made is the Flexible Enchantment. I have to fit your body." Rick explained while taking out a Mid Level Demon Crystal and a few Low Level Demon Crystals. He then connected the Crystals and the Rune with his fingers.

Just like how Roel taught him how to focus the Spiritual Energy into a certain part, Rick seemed to be able to do the same as his hand became the bridge of the Spiritual Energy between the rune and the crystals.

The armor gradually became less tight. In fact, he felt more comfortable this way.

"This is how you make an adjustment. You have to feed the Enchantment with Spiritual Energy from the Demon Crystal. It'll gradually expand in size while matching your body contour. I've heard that you've learned about this technique when helping my father."

"Ah, yes. That's why you said I could make the adjustment, right?"

"Yes. Even if we didn't meet you, you could do it yourself with some instructions."

"Showing it is better." Noel nodded, assuring him that he didn't mind either way.

Rick smiled and continued feeding the rune until Noel confirmed it was the right size. After that, he said, "How about channeling your Spiritual Energy to the other Enchantments to test it?"

Noel nodded and poured the Spiritual Energy to the Harden Rune. He realized that the armor became stiffer, making it hard to move. But he didn't feel much pain when he hit the armor.

He understood that Harden Rune would be extremely effective but he had to use it at a perfect timing.

After confirming its effect, Noel tried the second rune, the Dispersion Rune. This time, he used Spiritual Energy to punch his stomach. As expected, the Dispersion Rune scattered the Spiritual Energy, lowering the impact.

Roel knew that Noel would be fighting against the Demon, so Dispersion Rune would benefit him in the long run, since the demons could use Spiritual Energy from Mid Level Demon onward.

Depending on how he used it, the armor would become another form of weapon for him. But what satisfied him the most was when he put back on his clothes. It certainly made him look a bit buffed, but it wasn't much to the point others would notice the difference. Only those who had known him would notice it.

"How is it?" Rick asked.

"There's no problem. I can get used to this in less than a week since there's not much difference."

"Great. That means we've delivered your request completely." Rick smiled.

"How should I pay you? I even make you use Demon Crystals."

"Please don't mind about it. Our father is already thankful enough to fix this messy family. If he knows that I'm taking your money whether forced or not, I'll be beaten up. I also do it because I want to repay you."

"I see. Thank you." Noel nodded. "Still, since you have arrived here, I can bring you around. That much should be fine, right?"

"I have wandered around for the past few days. If you don't mind, you should bring Rica around since she must be sulking right now."

"Ahaha, will do." Noel chuckled. "Then..."

"Yes." Rick waved his hand, seeing him off while cleaning up.

Chapter 176 Septa

"Here you go." Noel bought a bag of fruit and asked Rica to take some. They were going around the town after Rick's suggestion. He was thankful to them to wait for him just so that they could give the armor personally.

So, he didn't mind to spend the rest of the day to show them around. Though, Rick didn't join them.

"Thank you." She received an apple while asking, "Do you have any recommendation when visiting this fort?"

Noel thought for a moment. He had been running around the town and helping the people, so his connection was quite wide among the citizens. Hence, he had a few suggestions.

However, there was one spot that held a special place in his heart.

"There is one." Noel smiled, recalling the memory of that place.

"Oh! Do you mind if we go there?"

Noel nodded as he didn't hesitate to bring Rica to the plaza where he first met the kids. Since that day, he never appeared before them anymore, but it didn't change the fact that he still watched them from afar, feeling happy with their achievement.

Like usual, the kids had been performing in the plaza with many people waiting for them. After months of dancing, the kids had truly gotten better.

"Oh my!" Rica raised her eyebrows in amusement. The kids were actually moving in unison. Although their moves were a bit sluggish compared to a professional dancer, they had their own specialty that no one could replicate.

They were actually dancing with swords. Every swing was quite big in soldier's perspective, but they truly gave a different charm, making them look beautiful.

Soon, everyone walked in pair and brandished their sword to each other. Still, the kid had an odd number, so the last person walked forward as if he was the one leading their movements.

Plak!

Pak!

Creak!

A different sound was produced when they hit each other's sword, but surprisingly, it created a festive mood as if they were clapping their hands in melody.

The people couldn't help but smile while clapping their hands at the same time as the sword was hit each other. Those enjoyed their performances were cheering while those who never saw them were curious.

Even Rica couldn't take her eyes off them.

Noel smiled because they were his pride and joy. Although their meeting was brief and an accident happened, the kids had truly grown from the children who grew in the slum to the kids who could change their own fate.

Noel also followed the clapping sound while enjoying the music.

Their performances lasted for another four minutes and the money started piling up in front of them.

"They're bright kids." Rica smiled while applauding.

"Indeed." Noel nodded without hesitation.

"Still, I'm kinda worried... They're still kids, so I'm afraid that adults are trying to take advantage of them." Rica sighed. "I mean there must be people who wants to take advantage of that money, right?"

The heavy atmosphere soon replaced the festive mood between them. What anyone didn't know that Noel had been spreading the rumors as ladre, telling them that someone wanted to take advantage of them and died the next day.

He put all those scary rumors so that no one would touch them. Of course, he often beat people up in the dark, which reinforced the rumor about someone protecting them.

This way, the kids could progress without worry.

But today's performance seemed to be different. There was a guy suddenly clapping while walking forward.

"Superb! That's the first time I see people swinging their sword so beautiful!" The guy was a young man with short spiky blue hair. However, his clothes were that of the military's uniform.

The kids squinted their eyes, becoming vigilant. They didn't know who this guy was. Even Noel observed this guy's movement, making sure he didn't make any foolish move.

"No need to worry. I'm not here to ruin your performance. I'm simply amused by your unique dance that involves the sword. It's something I have never seen before." The guy placed his hand on his chest like that of a gentleman. "Let me introduce myself. I am Septa, Demon Observer Squad's squad captain. Do you happen to be interested in joining the Demon Banner Army and become my students?"

"I can't provide you with whatever you are doing right now, but I can offer you some advices that you can apply to your dance. I believe you're going to be an excellent knights because of your unique style. That's what I want to see."

Noel narrowed his eyes, wondering who this Septa was. He thought Septa was a man who tried to roleplay a knight so that the kids could follow him. After that, he would be taking advantage of the kids by fooling them.

However, Rica seemed to recognize the name. "Septa? The Youngest Knight Captain of the Demon Banner Army?"

"Do you know him?" Noel squinted his eyes, curious.

"Yes. It's said that the Demon Banner Army has received a genius a few years ago. His name is Septa. He has been racking up achievements and becoming one of the youngest knight captains in history. He manages to reach that rank at 23 years old. But there's a rumor that the genius Anna Stargaze is becoming a knight here, so there's a huge chance that she will break the top record and become the youngest person to be the knight captain." She explained.

"I see." Noel nodded in understanding. It seemed that this guy wasn't role playing. Even if he was insane, no one would be impersonating a knight captain of the Demon Banner Army.

If the kids could learn from him and fix their mistakes in swordsmanship and polish it with their own dance, he believed they could grow even further.

So, he was a bit supportive with this choice.

But to his surprise, the children, especially the one leading them, Erica, politely bowed to Septa. "Thank you for the offer, Sir Knight. However, I'm afraid that we can't accept your invitation."

"Hoh?" Septa was amused because this was the first time someone rejected him. "Why is that?"

"We have someone we want to catch up and repay. If we join the Demon Banner Army, I'm afraid..." Erica paused, letting Septa understand the meaning.

Meanwhile, Noel, who was watching the entire thing, was moved. Her words stabbed right in his heart.

Chapter 177 Unexpected Visit

He never expected that the children wanted to repay him this much, even after learning about Septa.

What he didn't know was that the children had understood the rumors. No, Erica was the one to figure out the person in the rumor as the smartest kid in the group. She told them that Noel had been protecting her this whole time, making the children feel moved.

Even though he wasn't with them anymore, their 'Big Brother Noel' was still protecting them.

Their pure hearts truly wanted to repay Noel for everything because they knew that Noel would still take care of them until they truly grew up.

Septa seemed to be more and more interested in them as he asked again, "So, who is this man that you want to repay?"

"He is big br—" The children seemed to want to show Noel's kindness in front of everyone, but Erica hurriedly shut them up with a glare. If they gave away the name, the knight who seemed to be superior than Noel might make it difficult for him. She didn't want to repay Noel with trouble.

Erica shook her head and said, "I believe we can't tell you that."

"You are truly a smart kid. You think I'll make trouble to him after knowing his name. I heard that you're from the slum... so, I'm quite surprised to see such a smart kid like you. Alright, you don't have to tell me! How about this? I will guide you a bit after your performances and you don't have to enter the Demon Banner Army."

Erica squinted her eyes, feeling suspicious. She looked at Septa and said, "Something that is too good to be true shouldn't be trusted."

"As expected!" Septa was truly satisfied with Erica's intelligence. So, he added, "Then, I can guide you in front of these people. Fixing some mistakes here and there. I'm sure that I can't do anything to you that way!"

"But I don't see any reason for you to help us."

"I just want to see how far can you go with this style. After all, this dance is a new branch that has yet to be explored. As a swordsman, I obviously want to see how far can you grow... There's a chance that it will become popular in the future, so I'm just leaving my mark in that history." Septa explained while smiling.

"That's..." Erica thought for a moment. There was no demerit in this deal. If the person wanted, he could simply kidnap them instead of letting people know about his intention. And with him showing his status as the knight captain, it would make everyone suspect him in case something happened to them.

And Septa seemed to understand that implication because he added one more condition. "If someone harass you in the next three months, feel free to go to the barrack and tell the soldiers that Captain Septa is protecting you. Alright then, it's time for me to go. Make sure you think about it, kids. Give me the answer tomorrow... I'll visit your performance again."

After leaving the message, Septa left the plaza with a smile.

Meanwhile, Noel kept staring at his back, wondering whether the man had a hidden intention or not.

Seeing Noel's serious face, Rica couldn't help but say, "You seem to care about them."

"Ehm, I guess?" Noel scratched the back of his head, realizing he forgot to handle his emotion. The kids were truly his soft spot. They were the same as him, who were once useless but wanted to change their fate.

"In any case, the children seems to be wonderful. I can understand why you bring me here. Thank you, ladre."

"No, it's fine. Since the performance is over, it's time for us to leave as well. I have a few other places that I can bring you."

"Alright." Rica agreed and shifted the topic so that the atmosphere didn't become awkward.

Even though it was coincidence, Anna was actually among the crowd and noticed Noel and Rica walking together.

'That's Noel, right? Who is that woman beside him? This is the first time I see her and I don't think she's someone from this fort either. I was buying my dinner and watching the children's sword dance, but I would never expect Noel to be here with a woman.'

'Who in the world is that woman? Has Noel actually gotten involved in that kind of situation? But then again, I can't seem to remember the woman's face... I don't think I know her in my past life. She mustn't be someone important...

'Well, whatever. It's not my place to intrude on his privacy. I don't think it'll last that long anyway...' Anna squinted her eyes. She didn't realize that Noel's matter was actually much more important in her head compared to the appearance of another knight captain, Septa.

'Still, why am I that bothered after seeing Noel with a woman? I don't feel anything when the female knights hanging around him.' Anna scratched the back of her head, confused. 'Do I actually know her or do I not?'

She couldn't remember anything about the woman, so she just gave up and stopped concerning herself with Noel. Of course, on the way to her room, she was trying to recall all people related to Noel, wondering if there was an event she was missing.

Meanwhile, Noel and Rica continued walking around the town as Noel showed some good spots that he got from the local. It was a relaxing mood since he almost never stopped practicing every day.

Rica also told him that she would be leaving to another town to finally work as a merchant group recognized by her father. Noel wished her luck and continued until the night arrived.

But it seemed that fate still connected him to the man called Septa.

The next day.

"Noel, Anna. There is someone that wants to talk to you." Shale suddenly called them in the middle of their spar.

They were confused but still followed Shale to meet this person, only to find the familiar figure. This was the same person as the one they saw yesterday. The Demon Observer Squad's Squad Captain, Septa.

"Hello." Septa smiled while waving his hands.

Chapter 178 Reason

"Hello."

"This..." Noel and Anna obviously recognized him since they had seen him when they were watching the sword dance. They never expected to meet him today.

"I guess there's no need for me to introduce myself since you have seen me yesterday." Septa smiled.

"!!!" Noel and Anna tried to maintain their calm, but their heart skipped a beat, surprised to how they got found out.

"The guy who was glaring like crazy and the girl who observed me... Hahaha, don't worry. It's just my job. In fact, I kinda remember all the people I met yesterday." Septa chuckled.

Shale coughed and finally opened his mouth. "Even if you have seen this guy, I think it's better to introduce him again. He is Septa, the captain of the Demon Observer Squad, one of our elite squads as well."

"Oh! Nice to meet you." Septa smiled before turning to Noel. "Though, I'm quite curious about you. Your glare wasn't normal yesterday, so I assume you're the one those kids mentioned yesterday."

Noel's expression turned grim as if he was preparing to fight him. It was foolish to fight against someone like him, but he didn't want to get beaten up without putting up any fight now. There was one big question in Noel's mind. 'How does he know?'

Noel had put on a disguise yesterday, so it should be impossible for him to know unless such a thing didn't work against him or the commander himself told Septa about it. However, there was one more possibility, which was quite impossible. Septa had actually investigated him, even bypassing the commander's knowledge. This also showed Septa's ability as the captain of the Demon Observer Squad.

Septa was amused by Noel's reaction and waved his hand as if telling him everything wasn't like what he thought. "I'm not planning to do anything. I'm just curious with the kids, that's all. It's not like I have a lot

of time to teach them, so I'll just use some spare time to do it. In fact, that drive can make them get stronger faster. There's no way I'm going to erase that drive.

"Well, it's true that revenge is a force that can drive you forward far faster than anything else, but I'm just worried about their future. After that revenge, the kids would be broken and ended up dead. And what they did to get stronger... would be questionable. Hence, it's better to let them think this way."

Septa's words actually hit him more than the kids. His current main driving force was revenge. But he never did something unthinkable to get stronger. The only reason he could stay sane in this situation was due to his true goal. He had been thinking about what he would do after the revenge, allowing him to know which one would be bad for the body in the long run or not. This way, he could continue to pursue his goal after his revenge.

Still, Noel couldn't drop his guard down against this unknown guy that appeared out of nowhere.

Seeing Noel's expression, Anna asked, "Either way, is there a reason for us to be called here?"

"Oh?" Septa looked at Anna amusedly as if he never expected this kind of action from Anna.

Shale, on the other hand, didn't beat around the bush and explained. "I told you, right? Septa is the leader of the Demon Observer Squad. This squad only has one purpose. It's to investigate anything related to demons. That's why they're called Demon Observers.

"He has been recalled by the commander for several reasons, but surprisingly, all of them are related to you. So, I call you here to introduce him."

Anna furrowed her eyebrows. "By the way, which matters are related to us?"

Septa was the first to answer this question. "Ancient Demon Tree, the Supreme Devil Organization, and the incident about bandits using the demons."

"!!!" Anna and Noel instantly forgot about the previous problems as they recognized all these problems. It was true that they were related to everything.

Septa thought for a moment. "I can't say much to you guys, but I guess I can say these things... I have checked the place where the Ancient Demon Tree appeared. There is something weird about it because I notice some markings that I don't recognize. It should be related to the things from a thousand years ago.

"I'm going to check those markings and seek some trace of them all around the world. It's possible that there are more hidden demons than we originally thought. If it's just a natural thing, then we can consider it a natural disaster. But if a person has the key to unseal all those powerful demons, then we can only call it a weapon." Septa's expression darkened.

Noel was confused, but Anna's heart skipped a beat. She thought, 'So, that's how it is. The Demon Festival! In the future, demons suddenly appeared and terrorized the lands. It was a chaotic situation. Noel was one of the people who stood out the most in this incident because he killed numerous demons. It was also one of the biggest reasons Noel had received huge support for rebellion. But whether it's natural or not...'

The answer would come from Septa.

"Well, that's the first matter. As for the second one, I don't know about them that much. It's a hassle to investigate those maniacs. The guy you killed might be related to the third one as well such as becoming the beacon of those demons or something. But we have to investigate it again since it'll just become a conspiracy theory without proof.

"In any case, the fact that there is a low level member in this fort means there is someone from the higher level. They will think that we won't be on our guard anymore since we have found out about the spy since there shouldn't be any more spy. Hence, I'm the one in charge to investigate the whole fort.

,m "Last but not least, the demon and the bandit... I don't know what to say about this one other than ridiculous. This is the first time I have seen something like this. The report stated that the demons only attacked the people other than the bandits, so we're assuming they had a way to disguise their presence in front of those demons. If only we have some bandits to interrogate.

"Well, those are the things I can tell you right now since you're involved. If you know anything or a clue that I can use to investigate, please tell me about it."

Chapter 179 Noel's Plan

Anna closed her eyes as if absorbing the information she heard earlier. She wondered what she should tell him because the other party could start suspecting her as well.

Noel was a weird guy and her target, so it was fine if Noel knew about it. But it would be a different case with Septa since he was the formal investigator. She even knew what kind of figure Septa would become in the future.

Septa the Observer. When people thought this name, they would know he was the greatest investigator in the kingdom. Almost all cases he investigated would give the result. Even the Supreme Devil Organization would have a hard time to escape his eyes.

So, if he suspected her, it would be bad.

And Noel surely loved to take that opportunity... albeit, it was impossible for the time being. It would be better if he could snitch on her, but Anna would also snitch on him.

If both of them became Septa's targets, the worst case scenario would be their death. Even in the bad scenario, he could picture themselves getting tortured for the information. And if all his doubts about how Septa figured out his identity from the disguise, it was impossible to hide anything from Septa.

Hence, Noel was planning to direct Septa's suspicion somewhere else. He asked, "Well, our opponents are demons, so we'll cooperate. But will we get anything from it?"

"Hoh?" Septa squinted his eyes, staring at Noel. Noel was indirectly implying that he would only give him some small pieces of information in his cooperation. If he wanted more, he had to buy that information from him.

With his authority, he could force Noel to cooperate. But he wouldn't know how much information Noel was hiding. So, this was a negotiation.

"Interesting. What do you want from me?"

"The safety of the kids as well as you teaching them without making them do something they don't want."

"Mhm." Septa was amused by this request. Noel seemed to be a selfless guy. Before coming here, he had investigated him as well. The result was surprising. Noel had been going around the town and helping so many people. So, this form of selfless act was like a nature to him. It was quite surprising to see it from someone who devoted himself in revenge against the royal family and the Stargaze Family.

If not for Anna to be stronger than him, Noel wouldn't hesitate to kill her. So, he never expected that Noel to be this good.

Septa nodded and said, "I guarantee it."

Noel took a deep breath and gave a piece of advice. "This is for the first one. Bring a blacksmith with you, the more skilled they are, the better. If possible Master Blacksmith."

"Blacksmith?" Septa tilted his head in confusion because this was completely new to him. He wondered what kind of skill Noel was talking about. 'The craving on the rocks... blacksmith... No, Master Blacksmith... Wait! Craving and Blacksmith... Shouldn't it be the Spirit Enchantment? Is it related to that?

'If I'm not wrong, he was with a girl back then. The girl might not be that famous, but it couldn't escape our eyes. She was the daughter of Master Blacksmith Roel. He must have a piece of equipment with Spirit Enchantment from them. Is that why he is suggesting to bring a Master Blacksmith?'

This train of thought was quite interesting to him. He never thought about using the blacksmith to help him with the investigation. But if those cravings could be proven by those blacksmiths, they would know what was going on.

'Who is this Noel? Should I investigate him further? No, he's still useful. Rather than making him suspect me, I won't do it for the time being to gain his trust to get more information. If he has become too suspicious, I'll investigate him.' Septa thought before smiling, saying, "Alright. I'll take your suggestion."

Noel nodded with a calm expression. Of course, it looked foolish since Noel told him about the information. This way, Septa would be suspicious. The best course of action should be telling him nothing other than what stated in the report.

However, Noel had one more reason to direct Septa's attention to Master Blacksmith. The first would be the notebook containing runes in his room. If Septa knew about that book, he would suspect him to know the markings. And it would be weird for a guy like him to know about this.

Hence, Septa's reaction actually proved that he hadn't known the existence of the book. It meant he hadn't investigated him completely.

And after some more time, even if Septa knew about the existence of his notebook, he could simply say that he had been learning the secret of the Ardagan Family that derived back to his ancestor.

After finding the similarity between them, Noel could use Septa to promote the book as well. This was an effective power against the demons, so it would be good to spread it. This way, his popularity would skyrocket, allowing him to gain some influence in the kingdom. Even the royal family had to give him a title for this groundbreaking discovery no matter how much they hated him. If they didn't do it, the other kingdoms would snatch him from them. This was Noel's long term plan.

On the other hand, there was another possibility, which was to capture him and torture him for the information. At that time, he could simply kill himself. He had nothing to lose anyway, so killing himself was an option. And Moon Temple could become his shelter when that time happened.

And it seemed he also gained a bit from Septa as he said to him, "That's right. I think I should give you this information. When you were chasing after the bandits, you said you encountered someone that killed him from giving the information, right?"

"Yes."

"We're assuming that they're from the Supreme Devil Organization. With me investigating them, they'll shift their attention to me and forget about you. That's why you don't need to worry about further assassination attempts."

"I see. Thank you." Noel politely nodded his head.

"No problem. It's my job anyway."

Chapter 180 Suspicion

"Then, I'll excuse myself." After receiving the information from Septa, Noel nodded and immediately excused himself. He felt scared of this guy, who seemed to know everything.

Anna also followed him while thinking about this Septa. His power was truly beyond her imagination.

Looking at them, Septa glanced to Shale and asked, "Are they truly Noel Ardagan and Anna Stargaze?"

"What's wrong with you? Yes, they are."

"This is weird. According to the information, Anna Stargaze was the cause for his family execution, but I didn't see any hatred from Anna. And Noel seemed to believe Anna to be the cause. That hatred hidden underneath his heart... I can't imagine how he hides that." Septa squinted his eyes.

"Are you investigating them?"

"Not really, but it's kinda weird." Septa shrugged.

"You haven't been born at that time, so I guess you don't know the past relationship between Marquis Stargaze and Count Ardagan. I heard they were best friends."

"Then, the execution was a betrayal from Marquis Stargaze?"

"I don't know. There might be something deeper in it. But that's not a place I can stick my nose into. You should focus on the matter at hand as well."

"Yes, I know. Still, it's such a shame. Noel Ardagan and Anna Stargaze. With their current situation, it seems like they won't stop until one of them is dead. Both of them are quite talented... In fact, more talented than me. I bet both of them can easily become a captain class before 20 years old."

"I can kinda see their potential, but I'll just let the youngsters to handle their own problems." Shale shrugged. "For now, what do you truly think about those three cases?"

"Noel's suggestion is correct. After checking the memory in my mind, the markings seems to resemble Spirit Enchantment, so I'll bring a Master Blacksmith for the investigation. As for the Supreme Devil Organization, it's a hassle since there seems to be someone hiding among us."

"Among us? Among captains?"

"Yeah. That's itself a problem. You can suspect me, I can suspect you or anyone else. That's why this one will be a difficult problem. Last but not least, the Supreme Devil Organization is targeting us with the third problem. If they cause bandits emergence with demons from all directions, what do you think will happen?"

"We have to mobilize all our troops, leaving the fort defenseless. So, that's how it is..." Shale nodded. "It seems that their target is to destroy us as the beacon of this kingdom. We have been protecting the kingdoms from most demons, so if we're destroyed, there's a chance the kingdom will collapse."

"That's not all, Shale. Do you truly understand why I'm so fixated on Noel Ardagan?"

"Hmm?" Shale was confused for a moment before noticing the connection between them. "Are you suspecting..."

"No. I'm not suspecting Noel to be backed by the Supreme Devil Organization. But Noel, who has a grudge against the Royal Family and Marquis Ardagan, will surely become a great pawn for them. Now they know the existence of Noel and his talent, I'm afraid they're going to approach him soon."

"!!!" Shale widened his eyes in shock, but that expression soon turned grim, knowing the severeness of this matter. "What are you planning to do?"

"That's for me to know. As I said earlier, everyone can be the suspect. If I can't do anything, it means I'm the suspect. If I tell you and the information leaks, you're the suspect. If I report to the commander and the enemy knows what to do with me, the commander is the suspect. For now, I can't say anything to others about my plan." He shook his head.

"Are you joking with me? Captains like us aside, you're suspecting the commander?"

"That's why I don't want to talk to you about my plans. For me, everyone is suspicious no matter who they are. I even found a record that the Supreme Devil Organization had made a contact with the Royal Family."

"What? Even the Royal Family? Do they know how will it implicate them? The Supreme Devil Organization is not the enemy of our kingdom, but the enemy of the world."

"Yeah, yeah. That's all I can tell you. For now, I'm going to put my all in investigation."

"Alright. I understand." Shale nodded. "By the way, what's the deal with the kids? You're going to be their teacher?"

"I found out about those kids yesterday. They were quite an interesting bunch. Their sword style was actually a dance. Can you imagine dancing with a sword?"

"Dancing with a sword?" Shale raised his eyebrows. "You serious?"

"It's shocking, right? Their movements are a bit too big, but I'm going to fix some of their moves. It's their job to perfect their own dance. If they truly succeed, you might see a beautiful but deadly dance."

"Well, that might be worth seeing." Shale nodded. "Anyway, you should go back soon. I have to continue teaching the kids."

"Hehe, alright, Instructor." Septa smirked.

"Shut up. Someone will do it next year."

"Yeah. The gorilla will be the one teaching next year applications."

"Gorilla? You serious? Now, I'm starting to feel bad for next year's kids." Shale chuckled.

Septa shrugged and started walking away.

...

Meanwhile, Anna couldn't help but tease Noel after hearing that information. She smirked and asked, "So, you were there, Noel! I don't see your figure anywhere. The only Apprentice Knight I saw there was someone with a mask, who was never a part of our generation. Don't you think it's suspicious? It's suspicious, right?"

"I was there though, but not directly in the plaza. I watched it from somewhere," said Noel with a poker face.

"Really?" Anna chuckled. "Well, we'll leave at that. So, who is the woman with you?"

"What's wrong with your questions? Are you suspecting me to be someone else?"

"Hehe..." Anna smiled playfully. "What if I am?"

"That's ridiculous. And you even act like a wife catching her husband's adultery." Noel shook his head in disappointment. Whenever he used the wife and husband card, Anna would always back down and stop talking.

But surprisingly, this time, she continued, "Then, should I punish the husband by not cooking for him for a whole month."

"I don't care." Noel shrugged and walked away. "That's all. We're going to meet at the ancient ruin two months from now."

"..." Anna was speechless because Noel was weak against this type of attack. She thought he would react embarrassed like the time they met in the plain where he went to another route just to hide his embarrassment. But she suddenly noticed something. "So, that's how it is. It seems Noel has some relationship with that girl... Am I just the third wheel here?"

"..."